

Group on Earth Observations



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31 December 2003

Dear GEO Colleagues,

It was a great pleasure to meet so many of you at our very productive and successful GEO-2 meetings in Baveno, Italy. As you recall, the principal thrust of the GEO-2 Plenary focused on improving the GEO process to ensure effective communication of purpose and benefits of the GEO process to high-level policymakers, and to ensure that the GEO delivered relevant and usable documents to Ministers for decision-making. Under the leadership of the GEO Co-Chairs, the GEO-2 Plenary agreed to revise the set of documents to be produced by the GEO process, to include the following four documents:

1. Statement/Communiqué to be agreed by EO Summit II
The EO Summit II Statement or Communiqué will be a one page document stating approval of the Framework Document, pointing the way forward in the GEO effort, and encouraging broad participation in and support for the GEO effort, as well as any other elements as agreed.
2. Framework Document to be agreed by EO Summit II
The Framework Document will consist of a high-level synopsis of the GEO effort for senior policymakers, presenting the purpose, expected benefits, and broad framework for developing the 10-year Implementation Plan. This document will not exceed eight pages. It will be prepared by the Secretariat with substantive input from Subgroups, GEO Co-Chairs, and high-level experts within GEO. It will be reviewed by GEO-3 in South Africa, and presented for approval at the EO Summit II in Tokyo.
3. GEO Report to EO Summit II
The GEO Report (formerly called the Draft Framework Document) will build on the Subgroup chapters prepared for GEO-2 to provide a full technical description of the scope and elements to be addressed in 10-year Implementation Plan. The report, to be approved by GEO-4 in Tokyo, will serve as the foundation document for the development of the Implementation Plan.
4. 10-Year Implementation Plan to be presented at EO Summit III
(as tasked by GEO-1)

The GEO Secretariat Office will be releasing a summary report of the GEO-2 meeting in the coming days, along with an invitation to GEO-3 in South Africa. However, it was agreed at the meeting that the Secretariat would produce a draft outline for the Framework Document (#2 above) by 31 December 2003. That document follows this letter.

As you review the outline, please bear in mind the following key points:

- a) The Framework Document Outline is for informational purposes and not for formal comment. It will be entirely superseded on 5 February 2004 by a complete draft text for your review and discussion at GEO-3 in South Africa at the end of February. We ask that you reserve your comments for that time.

- b) The Framework Document Outline is a starting point only, and drafters are not formally constrained by its structure. Representatives of the GEO Secretariat and Subgroups will develop the language content over the next few weeks, and in doing so, may alter its structure.
- c) The Framework Document itself is intended for Summit-level approval, and will not be highly detailed. Its goal is to communicate effectively, to a senior audience, the raison d'être and far-reaching context for the 10-Year Implementation Plan. Its emphasis will be on the benefits of the entire endeavor, and will provide only brief descriptions of the elements, sufficient to inform decision-making while avoiding detail that may obscure purpose and encumber negotiations unnecessarily.
- d) The Framework Document provides context, but not explicit guidance, for creating the 10-Year Implementation Plan. The GEO technical community is not the intended audience for this document, but rather the ministers themselves and their constituencies in their home countries and organizations. Explicit technical guidance and process for creating the 10-Year Implementation Plan will be provided by GEO-4 through its approval and forwarding of the GEO Report to EO Summit II (See Item #3 above).

We hope that in providing you with this outline, you can begin to have a more complete picture of the Framework Document that GEO-3 will be asked to finalize and the EO Summit II will be asked to approve.

On behalf of the GEO Co-Chairs, thank you for your hard work at Baveno, and we look forward to seeing you in South Africa. Best wishes for a successful and happy 2004.

Warm regards,



Helen M. Wood
Secretariat Director
Ad Hoc Group on Earth Observations (GEO)

HMW/pc

Attachment: FDO

Ad Hoc Group on Earth Observations (GEO)
Framework Document
Annotated Outline

**Toward Comprehensive Coordinated and Sustained Earth Observations –
From Knowledge to Understanding**

Document Overview

The Framework Document is being prepared for approval by senior ministers and should provide the broad and far-reaching context for the 10-Year Implementation Plan. It is intended for a high-level policymaking audience and will be designed to present the most compelling case for advancing a comprehensive, coordinated and sustained earth observation system or systems. The document will emphasize benefits that will flow from the formation of such a system(s) in the form of direct societal benefits and improved decision-tools for the policymaking community. It will also provide an outline of the anticipated system elements and efficiencies, clearly emphasizing the philosophy of building from existing earth observation programs and systems. The document will be written persuasively, relying on pre-negotiated texts wherever possible. It will not exceed eight pages in length and will be designed graphically to capture and retain the reader's interest throughout.

I. Introduction

The Need for and Benefits of Coordinated Earth Observations

The document will begin with a short, attention-getting statement of the necessity of improving Earth observations and the socio-economic benefits of doing so, drawing wording from existing international texts such as the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development. This will consist of no more than two or three paragraphs and could include a bulleted list of the top three to five benefits from a policymaker perspective.

The Nature of Earth Observations

The opening section will also include a paragraph and bulleted list reference to the major environmental systems of the earth that are the subject of observation, to clarify the meaning of earth observations. This section will highlight observing areas associated with priority benefit areas.

Initial Steps

The introduction will provide a short explanation of the *ad hoc* Group on Earth Observations (GEO), its genesis and its mission. Excerpts from the Declaration should be included here, as well as reference to prior international conferences and agreements (such as the G-8 in Evian) that led to the creation of GEO. This section should highlight briefly the expected outcomes of the GEO process.

II. The Significance of the Framework Document

A brief paragraph will be provided to define the document itself and the significance of its approval. This section will state what commitments are (and not made) by accepting this document. This section may be moved to a different position in the document if deemed appropriate.

III. Key Benefits of Earth Observations

The benefits discussion will begin with well-documented statistics about the sensitivity of human life and economic wellbeing to changing environmental conditions. The three to five benefits mentioned in the opening argument will be re-stated here, with a more detailed description of each, showing how economic and social development is advanced and how human suffering is alleviated through improved earth observations. This section will also illustrate that the global environmental context is necessary to understand regional or even sub-regional scale phenomena and their effects.

IV. The 10-Year Implementation Plan

The elements discussion will begin with a short paragraph describing the 10-Year Implementation Plan broad terms, followed by concise paragraphs (one or two) on each element of the plan:

1. Guiding Principles (bulleted list)
2. Policy Priorities (bulleted list)
3. Foundation in Existing Efforts
4. User Requirements
5. Data Utilization and Data Policy
6. System Architecture
7. Capacity Building Plan
8. International Cooperation Plan

V. Challenges

Section V will provide a brief delineation of the major opportunities available (e.g. implementation efforts already identified by participating programs) and also obstacles that may impede progress toward achieving the promise of the 10-Year Implementation Plan, including such issues as costs, data policy barriers, earth observation radio frequency protection, etc.

VI. Conclusion – The Way Forward

The conclusion paraphrases the introduction, focusing again on the benefits of the entire venture and expressing optimism at the chances of success. The concluding section could also set forth major benchmarks or goals for the 10-Year Implementation Plan.